



Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs

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Kentucky Veteran to Receive French Legion of Honor Medal

(ELIZABETHTOWN, Ky Oct. 8, 2007) On Thursday, October 11, John Elder will receive the French Legion of Honor for his meritorious service in France during World War II.

In a ceremony with Chapter 3 of the Disabled American Veterans in Elizabethtown, Leslie E. Beavers, Brigadier General USA Ret., Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs, will present the medal to Mr. Elder.

"The French government and people of France are deeply grateful for the enormous sacrifices American service men and women made in liberating their country during World War II," Beavers said. "They are honored to recognize American veterans who served with distinction in France during World War II by awarding them the Legion of Honor."

Created in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the Legion of Honor is the highest award given by the French Republic for outstanding service to France. In 2004, the government of France decided to extend eligibility for the Legion of Honor to American veterans of World War II who served in France. Previously, the medal was issued only to American veterans of World War I. Members of the Army, Army Air Corps, Navy and Coast Guard who participated in one of the four major campaigns in the liberation of France (Normandy, Southern France, Northern France and the Ardennes) are eligible for this French award.

A D-Day veteran, Mr. Elder landed on Utah Beach at 8 a.m. on June 6, 1944. Two days later he was wounded by shrapnel to his left shoulder. After four months in the hospital he returned to the battlefield, serving in Belgium until France was liberated.

Mr. Elder endured 175 days of continuous firefight from Oct. 7, 1944 through March 30, 1945, earning the honored Combat Infantry Badge. He also received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his service.

The Citation from Jean-Baptist Main de Boissier, French Consul General in Chicago, reads in part:

It is a great honor and privilege to present you with the Knight of the Legion of Honor medal. Through this award, the French government pays tribute to the soldiers who did so much for France and Western Europe Thanks to the courage of these soldiers, to our American Friends and Allies, France has been living in peace for the past 6 decades. They saved us and we will never forget. I want you to know that for us, the French People, you are heroes. Gratitude and remembrance are forever in our souls.

You, John M. Elder, are among these heroes. Enlisted in 1942 as Private First Class, you participated with the 4th Infantry Division in the Utah Beach landing in Normandy, the Rhineland Campaign, and the campaigns in the East of France, where you demonstrated a remarkable sense of courage, devotion and duty. ...

To show our eternal gratitude, the government of the French Republic has decided to award you the Legion of Honor. Created by Napoleon, it is the highest honor that France can bestow upon those who have achieved remarkable deeds for France.

Mr. Elder joined the Disabled American Veterans in 1980, was chairman of the Benevolence Committee for 18 years and was named Disabled American Veteran of the Year for 1999-2000. He worked as a construction maintenance foreman for the Engineer Paving Section at Fort Knox for 30 years.

American recipients of the Legion of Honor include aviator Charles Lindbergh, inventor Alexander Graham Bell, dancer Josephine Baker, actor Charlie Chaplan, chef Julia Child, musician Duke Ellington, scientist Howard Florey, economist Alan Greenspan, astronaut Jim Lovell, war hero Audie Murphy, businessman Arthur K. Watson, General John J. Pershing, General Douglas MacArthur, General George S. Patton, General Omar Bradley, General Curtis LeMay, and General Wesley Clark.

The ceremony for Mr. Elder will begin at 7 p.m. EST at the Pritchard Community Center, 404 S. Mulberry St. in Elizabethtown.